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NEWARK COUNCILMAN LEADS FIGHT TO TAKE BACK HOUSING COMPLEX FOR RESIDENTS

"In a visible demonstration of defiance to the area's criminal element, Booker will set up temporary lodging outside and literally camp out on the front of one of the city's worst public housing tenements, eating and sleeping there around the clock for the next eight days"

Newark, NJ, August 12, 1999 -- As popular sayings go, two very familiar clichés are "put up or shut up" and "practice what you preach." Not surprisingly, these two adages are being taken to task by Central Ward Councilman Cory Booker as he demonstrates his resolve to winning back one of the city's worse housing projects for its residents.

In an unprecedented show of defiance to the area drug dealers, users, and other criminal element in the neighborhood, Booker is taking the dramatic and drastic step of setting up temporary lodging in the front parking lot of Garden Spires, considered by many to be the city's worse public housing complex.

“For a period of eight days, from August 15 through August 22, I literally will be living at Garden Spires,” said Councilman Booker. “Over these eight days, my short term goal is to stabilize this blight site by bringing in a variety of positive resources and productive activities that will lead to greater resident pride, individual participation, and improved living conditions. Notwithstanding, my more immediate goal is to give some semblance of hope to the many families living there that their elected officials are committed to effecting real changes that will serve to counteract the extremely negative environment and sub-par conditions in which they live.”

In addition to literally living on site for a marathon period of nearly 200 hours, Booker’s office has planned an ambitious week of resident and community activities intended to stabilize the area and showcase the many positive attributes of the residents and their neighborhood. Among the activities planned are a family-style barbecue, “Stop the Drugs Day,” health fair, job fair, “Youth Day,” back to school party, and gospel concert.

He continued, *“Over the past year, our office has been working closely with both residents and the Newark Police Department to find creative solutions to abate the rampant open-air drug dealing that has severely impeded and diminished the quality of life for the residents living there. Garden Squires is commonly known to be one of the city’s worse multi-dwelling housing projects. I believe that if we can effect real change there, then we can take what we’ve learned and adapt it as necessary to improve conditions at our other troubled developments.”*

Significant public safety and capital improvements to the complex are planned by building’s new owner, Michael Punderbeutel. Among them are the introduction of a new tenant swipe card system, increased security and police presence, a resident patrol, and new recreational activities.

Knowing he can't do this alone, Booker has enlisted an impressive array of public agencies, business, and concerned parties who will join in the week's events. Included are representatives from the Newark Police Department, Sheriff's Department, Essex County Prosecutor's Office, HUD, St. Barnabas Health Care System, UMDNJ, Planned Parenthood, NJ KidCare, Newark Fire Department, Hilton Hotels, FedEx, UPS, Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, New Jersey Nets, Newark Bears, McDonald's, Coca Cola, Wakefern Corporation, United Way, Integrity House, New Jersey National Guard, and a host of elected officials, civic leaders, and celebrity participants. A complete schedule of activities follows:

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GARDEN SPIRES

175 - 195 First Street
Newark, New Jersey 07107

Sunday, August 15

- *Family Style Barbecue*

Monday, August 16

- *Press Conference (10:00 am)*
- *“Stop the Drugs Day” -- Varied law enforcement agencies including Newark Police, Essex County Sheriff’s Department, Essex County Prosecutor’s Office, DEA, FBI, Garden Spires Security, along with area community and religious leaders*

Tuesday, August 17

- *“Garden Spires Tenant Association and HUD Day” -- Activities include tenant meeting, possible election of officers, appointment of floor captains, discussion of new procedures by owners and management, legal services and housing information (NOTE: Housing Day from 12 noon to 6 pm, Tenant Meeting from 6 pm - 9 pm)*

Wednesday, August 18

- *Health Fair -- Participants include St. Barnabas Health Care System, UMDNJ, MHS, Integrity House, NJ Association for Children, NJ KidCare*

Thursday, August 19

- *Job Fair -- Participants include City of Newark, Newark Fire Department, F.O.C.U.S., Hilton, FedEx, Port Authority of NY and NJ, First Occupational Center, La Casa Don Pedro*

Friday, August 20

- *“Youth Day” -- New Jersey Nets, Newark Bears, Batmobile, Ronald McDonald, United Way’s Celebrity Read, face painting, giveaways, refreshments, motivational speakers, movie night (tentative)*

Saturday, August 21

- *“Pre-Back to School Party (w/DJ) -- 12 noon to 6 pm*

Sunday, August 22

- *On-site Church Service (11 am)*
- *Senior’s Gospel Explosion Concert (concert to immediately follow church services)*
- *Evening follow-up and wrap-up session*